

## BOOK REVIEW

CYRIL ELGOOD: *Safavid Medical Practice, or The Practice of Medicine, Surgery and Gynecology in Persia Between 1500 A.D. and 1750 A.D.* London, Luzac, 1970. xvii + 301 pp. \$5.50.

The late Dr. Cyril Elgood left a legacy of writings on the history of medicine in Muslim lands, especially in Persia (Iran). A large part of his library was bequeathed to the Institute of History of Medicine and Medical Research in New Delhi, India. For many years he served as physician to Her Britannic Majesty's embassy in Tehran. There he became acquainted with the language, history, and culture of Iran—a country which he dearly loved. As a physician, through a first-hand knowledge of Iran and India, he wrote extensively on medical education and practice in Islam. His *Persian Medicine* (published in the *Clio Medica* series), and *Medical History of Persia and the Eastern Caliphate from the Earliest Times Until 1932* (published by the University of Cambridge, England, 1951) are two excellent examples of his prolific life as a historian of the healing arts. Both books were well received by medico-pharmaceutical historians interested in the Arabic-Islamic period. They superseded Adolf Fonahn's *Zur Quellenkunde der persischen Medizin*, published in Leipzig in 1910.

In the present volume Cyril Elgood traces with much insight the practice of medicine, surgery, and gynecology in Iran from about 1500 to the middle of the 18th century. This is a period often forgotten by historians; we are indebted to the author for throwing much light on this fascinating era in the annals of medical development in the Near East. The discussions cover the period from the reign of the Safavid King Ismail I to the dynasty's fall after King Abbas III. This period coincides with the reign of the Moghul emperor Zahir al-Din to the death of the Moghul Muhammad Shah.

The author divides the text into three sections. The first is a revised and enlarged edition of some chapters previously published in his volume on the medical history of Persia. The discussion is very useful. Of particular interest to this reviewer is Elgood's most valuable coverage of the function, duties, texts, and practice of the pharmacist during that period—a neglected chapter in the history of the apothecary's art. He

also discusses with meticulous detail the place, training, medical ethics, and responsibilities of the clinicians, the ophthalmologists, and the general practitioners, including court physicians. He further mentions medicine-men, poets, and uncultured practitioners who dabbled with therapeutics; some, notwithstanding, gained favorable public response and reputation. The exposition provides a true picture of the time and the level of development reached in the capital city, provinces, and towns in Iran. Also, the steps and procedures followed in medical education among the elites and used in court recruitment are represented carefully.

The second part is a revised edition of the author's *Safavid Surgery*, published at Oxford by Pergamon Press in 1966. It brings together aspects of the general development of all areas of the health professions in Iran during the same period. In examining the levels achieved by those who practiced surgery, one can discern little or no advance in surgical knowledge and practice beyond that of the *al-Tasrīf* of the Spanish-Muslim prodigy, Abulcasis al-Zahrawi (d. ca. 1013), and the *al-Umdah*, the surgical manual of the physician-surgeon Abu al-Faraj b. al-Quff (1233-1286) of Jordan. Further, Dr. Elgood relied in his assessment on the Turkish surgical treatise of Sharaf al-Din b. Ali b. Sa'buni, completed in 1465; this opus apparently formed the basic reference work of surgical teaching throughout the Safavid period. In reality, Sa'buni's illustrated work was almost completely influenced by al-Zahrawi's writings; unfortunately, no credit is given to them in the text.

Of interest is Elgood's elaborate discussion of the surgeon's educational procedures and the emphasis placed on the knowledge and teaching of anatomy. With the exception of the caesarian operation, which he eloquently describes, anatomy and physiology, as well as applied techniques in the art of surgery, remained basically galenic and for the most part were as rendered into Arabic by Hunayn b. Ishāq al-'Ibādī (809-873). These historical beginnings were ignored completely by Dr. Elgood despite the great role they played in this whole development.

The third and last section of *Safavid Medical Practice* is concerned with gynecology, obstetrics, midwifery, sterility, pregnancy, and the care of mother and child. With favorable detail, the author reflects the opinions of practitioners during the Safavid period on such timely

topics as abortion and birth control. The reader, however, finds no other innovations beyond the writings of the 13th century Ibn al-Quff on these and similar themes. This merely shows the continuity of Arabic medicine in these eastern lands up to modern times.

Nonetheless, the author throws light on works and a period hitherto little known in the West. Interestingly, he mentions treatises on opium and discussions on sedative drugs, the bezoar therapeutics, and pharmacy manuals and the pharmacist (pp. 21-22, 30-52, 155, 167-170) with delightful fervor. The presentation of data, however, falls short of the reader's expectation in regard to interpretations of the origins and ramifications of the humoral theory, the function and nourishment of the body, and medical precepts then taught and applied. The connection between Safavid medicine and surgery and ancient Persian and Greek medicine is not stated. One wishes, for example, an explanation of the link with the Arabic authors of the ninth through the 13th centuries whose writings formed the basis for the training of practitioners during the Safavid reign.

Errors in spelling and interpretation and inconsistencies in transliteration of Muslim names (for example, on pp. 33, 37, 64, 80, 121, 167, 209, 224, 229, and 282) abound in the text; some perhaps crept in during printing, yet these will not detract from the importance of the material, especially to the western reader. The regal tables and the illustrations are interesting. The contents fill a gap in medical literature and deserve the attention of all historians of Islamic medicine and culture. The volume contains valuable information and includes mention or discussion of the medical literary contributions made during a period of more than 250 years in the ancient land of Persia.

The recent death of Cyril Elgood was indeed a loss to the many who admired his thorough and intelligent evaluation of Persian medicine, its history and contributions to medical progress.

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